Got Privilege?

Privilege (n) /priv(ə)lij/ : All the accommodations society makes for you on account of your identity. Your social identity includes things like race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, among many many others. Privilege = Power. We all have some privilege just for attending a college like Middlebury. Here are 7 other things to know about it:

Privilege is not a sin; if you confess it, it won't disappear.

Privilege colors our experiences, but doesn't determine how we act.

There's no formula to calculate how privileged or oppressed you are. Better not to imagine there is.

We all need to listen more. When privilege is preventing you from listening, stop, take a seat, and try harder.

Guilt is common, convenient, and useless. We've got to get over the guilt and guilting so that we can dismantle the structures that enable our privileges to begin with.

"Check your privilege" is not a direct assault on your moral character. It is simply a request that you realize the advantages you have.

Be accountable to your mistakes. We all make them, but don't let it be an excuse to be shitty.

Professors:

Rebecca Tiger
Linus Owens
Tara Affolter
Sujata Moorti
J. Finley
Laurie Essig
Louisa Stein
Jamie McCallum
Catherine Wright
Mary Mendoza
Bill Hart
J Ralph
P. Mathews
Jonathan Miller-Lane
Mez Baker-Medard
James Davis
Susan Burch

Blogs:

https://beyondthegreenmidd.wordpress.com
protesthighered.tumblr.com
blackgirldangerous.org
http://youngist.org
http://www.crimethinc.com/blog/
http://everydayfeminism.com

Student Orgs:

Black Student Union
Women of Color
Distinguished Men of Color
Alianza
Raisins

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Cultural Appropriation

According to Fatimah Asghar of Black Girl Dangerous, cultural appropriation is when "members of a dominant group take elements and symbols of another culture for their own economic or social gain while simultaneously devaluing and silencing the bodies, opinions and voices of the oppressed culture."

If you are taking something from a non-dominant culture and putting it on your body, do some research and some thinking before you go out. Whose histories might you be trampling on? What stereotypes or caricatures might you be evoking? Who might be hurt or triggered by your choices? If the answer to the questions above is anyone, don't wear it.

Student Movements:

"Midd Included" is demanding a change to the college's Culture and Civilizations requirements to reflect a more inclusive and less eurocentric curriculum. It proposes making EUR and NOR credits options rather than requirements, breaking up Africa, Asia, and Latin America into separate requirements, to de emphasize the study of western culture.

"JusTalks" holds an annual J Term event for all first-years (including sophomore Febs!) to reflect and discuss issues of identity, power, and privilege. Student founded and organized, it will hold its fourth annual event this year. Register at go/justalks.

Divest Middlebury is calling on the College endowment to divest, or sell, from the Top 200 Fossil Fuel companies, based on the premise that the fossil fuel industry upholds a status quo contingent on the extraction and exploitation of people's labor and the environment. For more info: go/divestmidd

Juntos is a student group working in alliance with migrant farmworkers in Vermont to defend human rights, combat a racist immigration system, strengthen communities, and create a more just dairy industry. Email juntos@middlebury.edu to get involved.

Further Reading (definitely not a complete list)

Feminism is for Everybody - Bell Hooks, ***Are Prisons Obsolete?*** - Angela Davis
The New Jim Crow - Michelle Alexander,
Pedagogy of the Oppressed - Paulo Friere
This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate - Naomi Klein

go/ disorientation

If there's anything you take away from your first semester at Middlebury, it should be that our College's culture is one of MAINSTREAMS and MARGINS. Being at Middlebury College is difficult (or easy, depending on who you are) because of its perceived homogeneity, but know that students at Middlebury come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, especially around race, class, gender, sexuality. With the recent cases of racism on our campus, we need to come together as a community to address the mainstreams (*cough, cough* wealthy-white-hetero-males) and learn to empathize and organize alongside each other, including "marginalized" people with "mainstream" people on our campus.

This guide is an abridged version of a working-document written by a fluid collective of students committed to organizing, educating, learning, and building a transformative community. As students from diverse backgrounds and experiences, we critically examine Middlebury College as an institution. We think we can transform this place, or at least throw a wrench in the charge towards corporatization and whitefantasy-heterosexist-bleakification. This guide is a small effort to ask you to join us, or join with someone else, get creative, and make Middlebury a community in which everyone can be their full self. If you want to get in touch, contact disorientmidd@gmail.com.

Is Middlebury "progressive"?

Middlebury presents itself as a school with liberal values. However, diversity and multiculturalism serve the corporate interests of the college. In reality, there are very few faculty of color and fewer with tenure. Midd's intercultural center was only established last year (significantly behind peer institutions). Less than half the student body is on any financial aid, meaning that these families can afford to spend 60K a year. For context, the average US income is around 50K a year. Yes, Middlebury students are (mostly) good at being politically correct. But what does being "politically correct" even mean? When not offending people becomes more important than challenging the status quo or the structure of the institution at large, we need to reassess. Let's think about why certain words or actions are harmful instead of just tiptoeing around them. Tolerance of those who deviate from norms is not enough--nor is a society that offers assimilation as the only means of equality.

What is an ally?

There is a lot of [anti-black] racism on campus. We need to be proactive in dismantling the systems that perpetuate this racism [and violence] on our campus. There are many many places on the internet to find information about being an ally.

Here are some good tips to get started:

Listen more, talk less, step out of the spotlight, and be aware of how much space you are taking up in conversations.

'Ally' is not a noun. It is a verb.

Educate yourself constantly, one class doesn't cut it. Don't expect the people with who you are trying to support to educate you.

Pay attention to alternative media sources (re: list of blogs down below).

Listen to narratives of people of color and center their voices and leadership!

Don't use free speech as an excuse to espouse racism (re: ask yourself free speech for whom and at what cost?)

Do continue to reflect on what being an ally really means.

Most importantly, in the words of Mia McKenzie, "before you jump up to perform 'allyship' ask yourself, 'is what I'm about to say or do in any way beneficial to the person I'm about to say or do it to? If so, how?'"

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